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The Offices of the Company Are Located at

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SAD PLIGHT OF THE ISLAND OF CUBA

HAS THREE GOVERNMENTS AND NONE IS SUPREME.

Starvation and Desolation Are the Material Conditions and Suspicion, Jealousy, Morbid Dread and General Unreliability the Intellectual and Moral Conditions Which We Have to Confront—Uncle Sam's Big Contract in the Pearl of the Antilles.

P. H. St. John, in Harper's Weekly.

A primer recently published in the province of Santiago for use as a text book by children in the free schools of the insurgents gives this definition of Cuba: "Cuba," says the primer, "is an island. It is a republic. Its president is Bartolome Maso. Maximino Gomez is commander in chief of the army of liberation."
 In Havana, on one side of the Plaza del Armas, is a big white neo-gothic palace. It is the house of the captain-general. The Spanish flag is flying over it. In the corridors and reception rooms portraits of Spanish kings and queens alternate with portraits of the ruling of whose names, like Spanish power and policy, are sadly tarnished and blackened. Here Spanish generals and colonels in a glory of gold braid and spurs whisper and intrigue and smoke cigarettes as they have done for the last hundred years. It is the government of Alfonso XIII, king of Spain, corrupt and medieval and dying, but nevertheless a government.

Three miles from the palace, among the villas of the Vedado, is the salon Trocha, the home of the American Evacuation commission, where a number of gentlemen in immaculate American blue uniforms dictate letters to stenographers and transmit daily routine business with all the systematic business of a New York counting-room. Any one of them would consider it almost a personal affront to insinuate that any flag represents the slightest real sovereignty over Cuba other than the Stars and Stripes which wave from the peak of the roof over his head.

ANOMALOUS PICTURE.

This, then, is the anomalous picture Cuba presents today. In a narrow island seven hundred miles long, with a population less than half that of Greater New York, we have three distinct governments—no, to speak more exactly, would-be governments. The Cubans, mistrustful and sensitive. The Spaniards, protesting and quibbling. The American, insistent and aggressive. An this, too, in a country which for four years has been burned and plundered and fought over with all of that fierce intensity of which only tropical nature are capable. Every man's hand held against his brother and every hand has held a machete.

But the situation is further complicated by the quarrels and dissensions of the Cuban and Spanish parties. A Cuban is by nature a politician. The intrigues and excitement of politics are well suited to his character. With a muzzled press and only governmental parties, his fondness for political strife have never before found a vent, but now that the bonds are being very

day more and more loosened, the Cuban has a childish delight in taking part in political discussion. The more vehement and personal it is the better he seems to like it. Since the protocol, politics has become the ruling passion in Cuba. There have been many recent changes and counter-changes in them.

CHANGING PARTIES.

The autonomists, reformists and conservatives were the three parties in existence when the revolution began in 1895. In the political convulsions of the last three years the reformist party has entirely disappeared. The more radical of its members joined the insurgents, while the great majority became autonomists.
 With the coming of Blanco the conservatives went out of office and never came completely that they have only existed really more as an organization than as a living element in the politics of the time. The position of the conservative party for the past year in Cuba has been somewhat similar to that of the royalists in France—a remembrance of the past and a possibility of the future, rather than a reality of the present. All of Blanco's appointments were autonomists. An overwhelming majority of the deputies in the newly formed "camara insular," or local parliament, belonged to that party. It is a mistake to suppose that autonomists were any less loyal than the king of Spain than the conservatives had been. On the contrary, their loyalty was always that their loyalty was active and practical while that of the conservatives was passive and theoretical.

With the passing of the conservatives, the two balancing political parties were supplied by the division that at once followed among the autonomists into radical and conservative wings. They were both Spanish and both loyal, but the radicals wanted a more clearly defined and more immediate autonomy than did the conservatives. The debates between them in the camera were often fierce and vehement. In numbers the conservative wing was the stronger.

AUTONOMY'S FAILURE.

Autonomy, like the old regime, had proved a failure; but the two autonomous parties continued to exist. They realized the new conditions and made a party issue of it. The radicals, under the leadership of Eliseo Gibera, issued what in the United States would be called a platform. In it they declared that they accepted the triumph of the United States as final. That independence had been victorious, and they pledged themselves to support it, although they considered it their duty to take no actual part in politics and remain neutral until called by the "voice of public sentiment."

"The voice" seems to have called, because the radical autonomists are now hard at work fighting annexation. The other wing of the autonomists have joined with the old conservatives in a kind of forlorn hope that the peace negotiations in Paris will prove futile and that Spain may at least retain some sort of control of the island. Failing in that, they will work for annexation. Anything to save Cuba from the Cubans, whom they hate with the accumulated hate of centuries. An illustration of their sentiments is found in the recent declaration of one of their leaders, Marquis Rafael Montoro, that he expects to sell his property in Cuba and return to Spain; that he will never live in a country with whose government the Cubans have anything to do. It is not alone what are known as the

"recognized" Cuban parties who are struggling and clashing. The insurgents, too, have their divisions. The two months of enforced idleness and peace have turned the insurgent camps all over Cuba into debating clubs on the future destiny of the island. There are all sorts of groups and followers of individual theories, but they are all factions of the two leading insurgent parties. Both favor absolute independence, but the larger and stronger of the two, known as "The Nationalists," want it to come gradually. In their manifestos they say they have perfect confidence that the United States will keep its word in making Cuba absolutely free and independent. They look upon the presence of American soldiers in the island as a means to that end, and are willing to co-operate with them in the work of maintaining law and order.

A violent minority of the insurgents, however, maintain that the presence of an American army in Cuba is a positive menace if not an insult to Cuban liberty. They scorn the idea of a military protectorate, and assert that if the army of the insurgents was strong enough to gain independence they are strong enough to maintain it.

Among insurgents of both parties there seems to be a lack of gratitude to the United States for the part which they have played in helping to achieve Cuban liberty. They harp constantly in their newspapers and propaganda on the sufferings, hardship and heroism of the Cuban soldiers, with only a passing reference to the Americans whose money and guns and lives made Cuba free.

CONDESCENSION.

"Yes," said a Cuban general in his camp to me the other day, "the United States is a great nation; if they had not been we would never have accepted their offer of assistance in our struggle with Spain."
 That is the spirit of all Cuban comment on the United States. They were kind enough to accept our services in their behalf. "The condescension in foreigners" reaches its climax in Cuba.

Meanwhile reconcentrados die, and the Spaniards retire. The first rapidly and the last very slowly. Every one in Cuba has become so used to reconcentrados' sufferings that their daily deaths from starvation attract far less of public interest than the seeming political questions of the hour. Numerically, there are not so many deaths among the reconcentrados today as last spring. The reason is that so many have died already that there are really comparatively only a few victims left for the death harvest. The blockade added to the hunger horror all over the island, but its force was principally felt outside of Havana, where the concentrated resources of a metropolis were enabled in some degree to alleviate the sufferings.

An illustration of Cuban conditions I witnessed the other day in Matanzas. Here the suffering and mortality among the reconcentrados is something frightful; men and women drop like dogs in the street every day, and die without a groan. Autonomists, Cubans and Spaniards blame each other for the sad state of affairs, but all insist that there is positively no money in the town with which to buy provisions.

INCONSISTENCY.

General Betencourt, who is the insurgent commander of Matanzas province, has a camp only four miles away with seven hundred strong, healthy-looking fellows, who go through a machete drill every day and discuss politics

General Betencourt was formerly a physician in Matanzas; he is a most intelligent, well-educated man, and perhaps represents the best type of Cuban commander. In order to show me how much better the insurgents were faring than their enemies the Spanish soldiers, he led me into a large shack which he used as a commissary warehouse. From floor to roof it was piled high with barrels of beans and corn-meal.

I asked General Betencourt where he got the supplies in time of peace. "Why, the explanation is simple," he said. "They are contributed to us regularly by our friends in Matanzas; to be sure it is a sacrifice for them, but they are willing to make it for the cause of Cuban liberty."

What a characteristic Cuban inconsistency! Food enough to support seven hundred able-bodied men, all able to take care of themselves, who ought to be at home tilling the fields, but not a cent for the hollow-eyed women who fall dead with their babies in their arms every day only four miles away. In the cafes of Matanzas men will sit for hours discussing a possibility for the presidency of Cuba; any unusual animation in the discussion will draw a large crowd, pestering and excited. But I saw a seventeen-year-old girl fall dead from starvation as she passed by the market-place. Her death attracted no more attention than that of a cab horse on Broadway.

A BAD ATMOSPHERE.

The background of the sad picture of Cuba today is the tropical, imaginative, unreliable character of the inhabitants of the island.

"There is something in the atmosphere here," said a prominent Spaniard in Havana to me, "which seems to bring dishonesty and disgrace to every one on the island just as completely as yellow fever lurks in every summer breeze that blows from Havana harbor. No matter how honest a man may have been in Spain, the minute he lands in Cuba his one object in life seems to be how much he can steal from the men who trust him."

Corruption and dishonesty have always been the curse of poor Cuba. They have reached their climax since the signing of the protocol. Every official, from the highest to the lowest, is engaged in a mad rush to line his pockets before the curtain falls on the last act of Spanish rule. A great deal of stealing is done openly. I have frequently heard Spanish officers and custom house men justify their thievery on the ground that corruption in Madrid had defrauded them of their salaries, now irrevocably overdue, and that they stole only to retaliate on the men who had cheated them.

There are many interesting personalities in this wild sea of politics. Gomez said recently: "Cuba has reached the stage where it needs a Gambetta; what Cubans had better do is to find one." Gambetta has not yet appeared.

THE FUTURE.

What will be the outcome no one can predict. In Cuba the fact that the United States have pledged independence to the island is usually regarded as an insuperable obstacle to annexation. Independence has many dangers and is connected with many problems. The prevailing idea in Cuba seems to be that an American protectorate that recognizes the Cuban republic in some such way as England does the Khedive of Egypt will be the ultimate result.

a lifelong friend his dreams for the future of his country. "But," said his friend, "my dear Jose, supposing that you do succeed, what kind of a mess do you think the Cubans will make when they try to govern themselves?"

Martí was silent for a moment, and then said: "Whatever they do cannot be worse than the Spaniards."
 The sentiment of the Maximo of Cuba expresses what more than half of his victorious countrymen believe today. Few of them take an optimistic view of the situation. If they can only be allowed to live and retain possession of their property for the next ten years they will be grateful. They realize better, perhaps, than any one else that the immediate future of Cuba is dark and strewn with dangers; but however dark and dangerous it be, "It cannot be worse than the Spaniards."

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